
To
Cabinet Member (Community Services)

14th March 2006

Subject
Recommendations from Scrutiny Board (2) concerning the development of the Brandon Wood Farm / Henley College Partnership

1 Purpose of the Note

- 1.1 To inform the Cabinet Member (Community Services) of Scrutiny Board 2 (Children's Services, Supported Community Services and Health & Housing) recommendations following their consideration of a progress report on the development of the Brandon Wood Farm / Henley College Partnership on 2nd March, 2006.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Cabinet member is recommended to give further consideration to the detailed implementation of the move to develop Brandon Wood Farm as an education centre of excellence by:
- (a) Considering the concerns of existing vulnerable service users of Brandon Wood Farm, particularly
 - those with more profound and multiple disabilities
 - those unable to cope with change
 - those who have been attending for a long period of time.
 - (b) Considering the concerns expressed in relation to
 - the removal of day care provision
 - the reduction in hours of attendance
 - the suitability of the 'packages' of care being offered as an alternative and the effect these would have on carers.
 - (c) Considering the provision of alternative care packages including the operation of a smaller day care scheme continuing current levels of care for those with more complex needs and exploring opportunities for paid employment at the Farm.
 - (d) Agreeing to a request that until the Board have an opportunity to re-consider progress in offering service users alternative packages of care, no service users will have their attendance at Brandon Wood Farm withdrawn without the agreement of themselves and their carers.

3 Information/Background

- 3.1 At their meeting held on March 2nd, Scrutiny Board 2 considered the recent proposals for development of the Councils' partnership arrangements with Henley College for Brandon Wood Farm. These proposals, approved by Cabinet on 28 June 2005, will create an 'inclusive centre of excellence for training and education' at the Farm, and will result in a diverse curriculum of training courses being available for a larger number of service users than are currently accommodated.
- 3.2 As part of the 2004/05 budget Members asked officers to take £500,000 out of the budget for day care services to people with learning disabilities. The changes to Brandon Wood Farm contribute to these savings.
- 3.3 These proposals had been considered by Scrutiny Board 2 prior to final approval by the Cabinet, and whilst Members had expressed concerns about the alternative educational and employment opportunities available to people with learning disabilities, and the transition arrangements, they supported the broad vision for the new Brandon Wood Farm.
- 3.4 To inform the Board's consideration of this matter on 2nd March Members took evidence from a number of different sources:
 - Service users who were assisted by Grapevine an independent advocacy service for people with learning disabilities.
 - The Director of the Coventry Carers Centre, plus three principle carers of Brandon Wood service users.
 - Interest Care, a voluntary sector organisation providing services for people with learning disabilities.
 - Officers from the City Council's Community Services Directorate.
- 3.5 The Farm currently provides a service for 78 people over a range of timetables with some 33 service users attending for a full 5-day week. Under the new arrangements for Brandon approximately 1500 hours of education and training will be provided, ensuring that many more service users from across the City are able to access education in this environment.
- 3.6 The Board heard from both service users and carers that there were some concerns about these new arrangements, particularly with regards to those service users considered to be more vulnerable (see 2 (b)). Whilst many people praised the vision and the partnership work between the City Council and Henley College, concerns remained about the reduction in the time allowed for those service users continuing to attend the Farm (and what they would do on the days not at the Farm), and the fact that after the new educational courses were concluded service users would exit the Farm and need to be found alternative educational / employment or day care opportunities. The issue of change was seen by a number of witnesses to be a significant factor and was of great concern to them.
- 3.7 Members noted that officers were in a process of working with service users and carers on alternative packages of care. Already a number of current service users have had their personal plans assessed and have had alternative activities and care packages identified to suit their particular needs. There are a wide variety of funded projects available in Coventry for people with learning disabilities and further opportunities are being explored including alternative educational courses, community based activities and in some instances other day care services. Members were concerned at the lack of progress in completing the assessments of individual service user needs and asked officers to report back on further progress in June.

- 3.8 The Board were advised about the various efforts being undertaken to modernise services for people with learning disabilities, with a new emphasis on attempting to avoid a reliance on day care and promoting independence. The EAST project is involved in preparing people with learning disabilities for employment based opportunities, and already 12 service users have been trained and equipped with the necessary skills to take on jobs.
- 3.9 When the City Council first went into partnership with Henley College at Brandon Wood Farm three courses were available to service users, and these were often repeated with little aspiration that the activity would achieve anything. Since these times services at the Farm have been transformed and the new Partnership will result in a very wide and varied curriculum. These courses will be directed at enabling service users to acquire skills and competencies which will be demonstrable in the work place, encouraging them to lead more diverse and independent lives. There is a real conflict between this aspiration and the views of some of the carers of service users. Staff are sometimes in a position where they are encouraging service users to be more independent in the face of resistance from carers. Some carers stated at the meeting that they were more than happy with their family-members spending 25 years at the Farm, and if possible 25 years more.
- 3.10 At the meeting the Director of Community Services explained that the Directorate was committed to working with service users and carers to alleviate concerns and make sure any transition to new services was handled as sensitively as possible. The budget agreed by the Council is challenging: however, officers will work with service users on a case-by-case basis. The Board was particularly concerned about the views expressed by both carers and service users about the most vulnerable service users. These were the people with more profound and complex disabilities, and those who had spent particularly long periods of time at Brandon Wood Farm.
- 3.11 Accordingly the Board agreed to request that the Cabinet Member re-examine the implementation of the proposed changes and consider some additional measures to support these more vulnerable service users. The Board also resolved to re-consider the progress in this development at a Scrutiny meeting early in the new civic year and requested that until this meeting is held no service users should have their attendance at Brandon Wood Farm stopped without the agreement of the service users and carers.

3rd March 2006

Briefing Note Author:
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